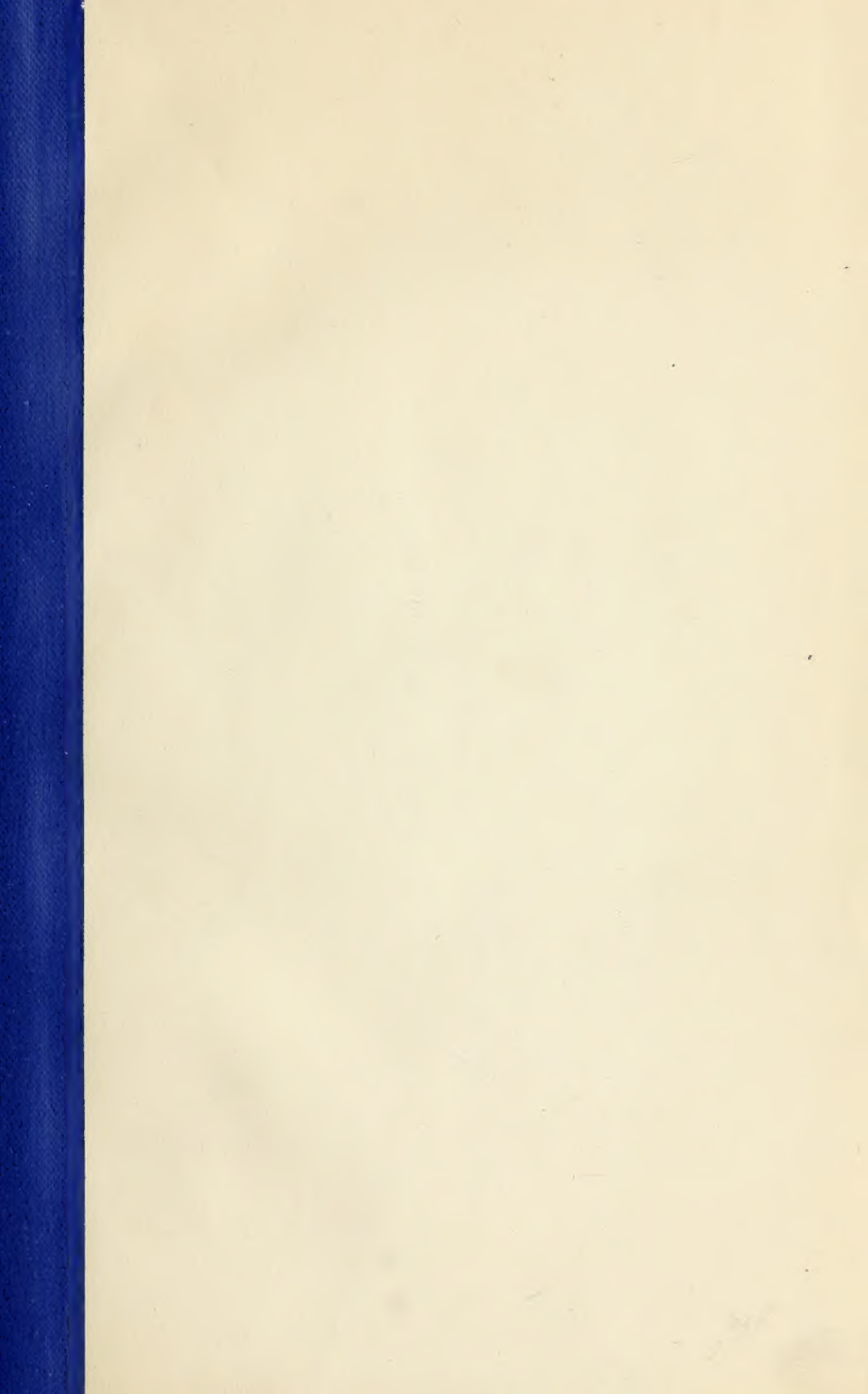


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OMAR KHAYYAM.



BY
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XVIII.

OMAR KHAYYAM.

By H. BEVERIDGE.

AS is well known, the authors of the earlier Persian anthologies do not give specimens of Omar Khayyam's poetry. In fact, they did not regard him as a poet, but as a *hakim*, or philosopher, who occasionally wrote verses, and perhaps this view is more correct than the ordinary European one, and the estimate which Omar himself would have made. Poetry with him was the amusement of his leisure hours, and we might style his quatrains, in the words used by Palgrave about Bacon's stanzas, as "a fine example of a peculiar class of poetry—that written by thoughtful men who practised this Art but little." Such intermittent springs of poetry are not much appreciated by Orientals, who like quantity as well as quality. In speaking of a poet, they are generally careful to tell us how many thousand couplets he wrote. They admire Firdusi perhaps more for his having written 50,000 couplets—exclusive of his Joseph and Zulaika—than for his really fine passages, though it must be admitted that they seldom read him through, and practically only know him in extracts. As Professor Cowell has remarked in his excellent notice of Omar, which well deserves reprinting, "Every other poet of Persia has written too much—even her noblest sons of genius weary with their prolixity. The language has a fatal facility of rhyme, which makes it easier to write in verse than in prose, and every author heaps volumes on volumes, until he buries himself and his reader beneath their weight. Our mathematician is the one solitary exception. He has left fewer lines than Gray."

Daulat Shah (Professor Browne's ed., p. 137) mentions Omar, but only as an astronomer, and as the ancestor of a poet named Shāhfūr Ashhari, who seems to be quite unknown at the present day. There is, however, a comparatively early writer who gives specimens of Omar's quatrains, and also a *qiṭ'a* of sixteen lines which appears to have escaped the notice of biographers. This is Saiyid 'Alī b. Maḥmūd al Ḥusainī, who lived in the time of Akbar, and who wrote his Tazkirah entitled the Bazmārāi, or "Ornament of the Banquet," in 1000 A.H., or 1592 A.D. A manuscript of this work is in the Sydney Churchill collection in the British Museum, Or. 3,389, and is described in Rieu's Supplement to his Catalogue of Persian MSS., p. 73, No. 106. The account of Omar is under the word Khayyām, and begins at p. 77^b. It begins with a high-flown panegyric, in which Omar is described as "the Pole of the heaven of vision, and the Pearl of the ocean of wisdom. All the wise men of Persia were but his slaves, and the wise men of Arabia confessed their inferiority to him. In the solving of difficulties Euclid was surpassed by him, and Aristotle was his packman. In order to whet his intellect and to test his powers Omar would write verses, and among them is a *qiṭ'a*." It is curious as showing how Saiyid 'Alī regarded Omar's verse-making as only a subsidiary accomplishment, that we find him using the same phrase of whetting the intellect, etc., at p. 159, in describing the poetry of the Emperor Akbar, of whose compositions several specimens are given.

The *qiṭ'a* consists of a satirical dialogue between Omar and Reason. Omar puts several questions, and Reason gives mocking replies. The text is as follows:—

OMAR KHAYYAM'S VERSES.

دوش با عقل در سخر بودم کشف شد بر دلم مشالے چند
گفتم امی مایه هم دانش دارم الحق ز تو سوالے چند
چیت این زندگانی دنیا گفتم خوابت یا خیالے چند
گفتم اورا چه حاصل امت بگوي گفتم در دسرو وبالے چند
گفتمش چیت کد خدای گفتم ساعتے عیث و غفہ سالے چند
گفتم اهل ستم چه طایفہ اند گفتم گرگ و سگ و شغالے چند
گفتم این نف رام کے گردد گفتم چون یافت گوشمالے چند
گفتمش حیت گفتمہ خیام گفتم بیراست حب و حالے چند

TRANSLATION.

Yesterday I jested with Reason.
My heart wanted some explanations.
I said : " O fulness of all knowledge,
I desire to ask you some questions.
What is this life in the world ? "
He said : " A sleep or some dreams."
I said : " What is the result of it ? "
He said : " Headache and some griefs."
I said to him : " What is marriage ? " He said :
" Pleasure for an hour and irritation for years."
I said : " What is the troop of oppressors ? "
He said : " Wolves, dogs, and some jackals."
I said : " What will tame this sensual soul ? "
He said : " When it has got some buffets."
I said to him : " What are Khayyam's writings ? "
He said : " Wrong calculations and some frenzies."

After the *qiṭ'a* there come numerous extracts from the quatrains. Probably Omar was a favourite at Akbar's free-thinking Court, and Saiyid 'Alī, who had for his patron 'Abdu-r-raḥīm the *Khān-khānān* and son of the great Bairām, may have been induced on this account to quote him so largely. We know that Akbar admired Omar, for he said that his quatrains should be taken as a relish to the wine of Hafiz's odes, and we find even the orthodox Badayūnī quoting from him.

Another notice of Omar occurs in the *Tazkirah Ḥusainī*, a work described in Rieu's Catalogue, I, 372^a, and in Sprenger's Catalogue of the Oude MSS., p. 134. This *Tazkirah* was written by Mīr Ḥusain Dost Sambhalī, and consists of short biographies of Imāms, saints, and poets, arranged in alphabetical order. Its date is much later than that of the *Bazmārāi*, it having been written at Delhi about 1750, or nearly at the same time as the *Riyāzu-sh-shu'arā*, quoted by Mr. Denison Ross. Omar's name appears in it under the letter *Kha*. After mentioning, as in other biographies, that Omar was in high favour with Sultan Sanjar and used to sit beside him, it goes on to say that at last Omar opened the door of self-reproach for his drinking propensities, broke his flagon (*abriq*) and spilled the wine upon the ground, and then recited a quatrain (quoted in the MS.), telling how he had closed against himself the door of enjoyment. We are also told that Omar's countenance had become black, but that on his expressing contrition and praying to God for pardon his complexion was restored to him. The *Tazkirah* then tells the story about Omar's mother praying that he might be forgiven, and quotes the quatrains numbered 185, 398, 411, and 488 in Whinfield's edition, but with variations in the case of No. 185. With reference to quatrain 488, which is the one Omar is said to have quoted to his mother in a dream, it is singular that in the Lucknow MS., described in Sprenger's Catalogue, p. 464, this quatrain began the series. This might imply that it was written by some posthumous defender of the poet. It may also be noted

here that the author of the *Bazmārāi* adds after Omar's name the words "May God have mercy upon him," as if Omar had been a good Musalman. Both the *Riyāzu-sh-shu'arā* and the *Tazkirah Ḥusainī* describe Omar as having begun by being very pious and ascetic.

With reference to Mr. Denison Ross's life of Omar, p. 55, I may point out that the story of the three friends is older than 1310. As far as is known, it is first mentioned in the *Jami'-ut-tawārikh*, which was completed in that year, but it is given there as taken from a book called the "Adventures of Ḥasan Ṣabah," which was found at the taking of Alamūt in 1256. See the *Calcutta Review* for October, 1904.

In his notice of Omar, Dr. Sprenger refers to *Khūshgo* and the *Atishkada* for particulars. The *Atishkada* has been lithographed, and the notice occurs at p. 139, but the first volume of *Khūshgo* seems not to be in any English library, though it is in the Berlin library, Pertsch, p. 619, No. 652.

It has been supposed by Fitzgerald that there is an allusion in the last line of quatrain 353 (Whinfield's edition) to the alleged dying exclamation of Niẓāmu-l-Mulk, but the expression "We come from earth and to the winds we go" seems to be a commonplace with Persian poets, and occurs under another form in the *Shāhnāma*. When Sohrāb is dying, he says (p. 367 of Turner Macan), *Chū barāq āmadam raftam iknūn chū bād*, "Like lightning I came, like wind now I go."


The new life of Omar by J. K. M. Shirazi does not, I regret to say, add anything to our knowledge of Omar. The author speaks of having had access to some extremely rare MSS., but, if so, he has brought nothing back. He mentions a *tazkirah* of the thirteenth century, but does not give its name, or tell us any more of its contents than that it says Omar lived to be more than a hundred!

It would seem that Hyde was the first European to call attention to Omar and to quote one of his quatrains. For this reference I am indebted to my friend Mr. Whinfield, who quotes Hyde, *Specimen*, p. 499. The next person after him, perhaps, who wrote about Omar was Mountstuart

Elphinstone, who, in speaking of an Afghan sect bearing the name of Moolah Zukkee, says: "Their tenets appear to be very ancient, and are precisely those of the old Persian poet Kheioom, whose works exhibit such specimens of impiety as probably never were equalled in any other language. Kheioom dwells particularly on the existence of evil, and taxes the Supreme Being with the introduction of it, in terms which can scarcely be believed. The Şūfis have unaccountably pressed this writer into their service; they explain away some of his blasphemies by forced interpretations, and others they represent as innocent freedoms and reproaches, such as a lover may pour out against his beloved" (Account of Caubul, ed. 1842, i, 274).

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